

Zdzisław Mach

Ludwik Gumplowicz (1838–1909)

Ludwik Gumplowicz, one of the creators of modern sociology and most eminent of Polish academics, was born in Cracow on the 8th of March 1838. He was the fourth of five children born to Abraham Gumplowicz (1803–1876) and Henrietta née Inländer. His father, Abraham Gumplowicz, had been brought up in the Jewish district of Cracow, Kazimierz, his family most likely having arrived there from Silesia in the 18th century. Having received a traditional upbringing as befitted an Orthodox Jew, he followed in his forefathers' footsteps and busied himself as a merchant. He had a textile shop but he also set up a second hand bookshop and lending library, which may be seen as a reflection of his intellectual interests – ones going beyond Jewish tradition more in the direction of the German-Jewish enlightenment, with which he had probably come into contact during various business trips around western Europe. In 1838, he was granted Cracow citizenship, which was an indicator of not only his high material status but also his cultural and social integration. His knowledge of Polish was rudimentary yet for all that he spoke fluent German and was in contact with the Austrian civil servants stationed in Cracow. Abraham Gumplowicz may be treated as an example of a Jew brought up in a traditional Orthodox environment and who under the influence of modern social ideas moved out from the cultural ghetto (he was also to physically do the same: moving to Stradom in 1838, the street which

constituted the symbolic boundary between Jewish Kazimierz and the Christian part of Cracow) and integrated with the multicultural society of Cracow. Brought up in a very traditional Jewish culture (he was married for the first time aged 16) he was to become an eminent representative of the movement to modernise and construct a new Jewish identity in Poland. He was extremely critical in relation to the dominating traditional current within Cracow's Jewish community, chiefly represented by the Orthodox rabbis, who held religious and social power. He founded a progressive association and published reformist leaflets. Remaining, so it appears, Orthodox in purely religious matters, he worked towards the modernisation of Jewish society both in Cracow and the Polish Lands. He became a loyal and involved Cracow citizen, fulfilling the function of councillor at Cracow municipal council. One may conjecture that A. Gumplowicz saw the Jews' future within the Polish Lands in terms of close integration with the modern Polish society that was being created. This may be borne out by his support for the January Uprising, during which his flat served as the main quarters for those young people preparing to cross the border and take part in the uprising, as well as being a hospital for the wounded. It is difficult to say, however, to what degree those sympathies came from a sense of belonging to the Polish nation as culturally understood. This is rather unlikely taking into consideration Gumplowicz's biography, which sees him initially attracted to Jewish Orthodoxy and later to the reformist movement coming out of Germany. One may also conjecture that A. Gumplowicz was more interested in the formation within the Polish Lands of a vibrant and pluralistic society, in which Jews could find their own modern identity. The overthrowing of authoritarian dictatorships, both state and those which hindered the development of individual freedoms within ethnic enclaves, was a condition for the realisation of such a vision.

Abraham Gumplowicz's son Ludwik, born in 1838, was therefore brought up in a home in which until very recently Jewish tradition had been prevalent yet in which a process of modernisation and cultural assimilation had taken place. Both the non-Jewish name and the choice of a legal career was evidence that the Gumplowicz family saw their (and their children's) future connected with a modern society in which ethnic traditions were increasingly marginalised to the private sphere. From 1848 to 1857 Ludwik Gumplowicz attended the St. Anna Secondary School, where he developed friendships that were to accompany him into adult life. After finishing school he enrolled at the Jagiellonian University's Law Faculty. The university in Cracow was possibly not the ideal place for the young Ludwik as a result of the intellectual conservatism then in force. Secret societies were formed at the university, their purpose being self education. Ludwik went to one of these, called the Filippi Workshop, together with his old classmates from secondary school. The

meetings of this liberal organisation were attended by Kazimierz Chłędowski, Alfred Szczepański, Parys Filippi, Jan Matejko and Artur Grottger. For Ludwik Gumpłowicz this was a valuable alternative to the conservatism of the university, but he critically reacted to the then growing climate within a Cracow of Polish ethnic nationalism in its Catholic guise. This religious variant of Polish patriotism was an obvious impossibility for Gumpłowicz to accept ideologically: for an intellectual and one of Jewish roots, brought up in a home steeped in the ideas of the Enlightenment.

L. Gumpłowicz was to spend the last year of his legal studies in Vienna and it was there he received his certificate of university completion. In the same year of 1861 he returned to Cracow with the intention of gaining a Ph.D. The atmosphere in the city was already full of patriotic zeal of a kind that did not enamour Gumpłowicz. In a letter to Władysław Przybysławski he wrote, among other things, that the ‘quasi nationalist movement is taking on such a hideous form here – “patriots” are increasingly stupid, that honestly it leaves a man with common sense nothing else to do than either to sit at home or be abused as an Austrian. To go out onto the street here there is nothing more to see than eternal processions, venerations – kneeling crowds fill the streets – and from all around the mind deadening constant “Oh God, do something for Poland.”’

In 1862 Gumpłowicz was awarded a Ph.D. for his work *Zdania ze wszystkich umiejętności prawniczych i politycznych* [Views from all legal and political abilities]. The following year he married Franciszka Goldman; with the marriage being at odds with Jewish tradition for it was not arranged and did not have the family engaged in matchmaking. For Ludwik his wife was also in a sense his intellectual and spiritual partner, it is known that she was well read but she even quite possibly published books anonymously, ones containing early feminist ideas. Ludwik successfully developed his legal career, working as a public notary as well as a defence counsel in criminal cases. It was during this period that his aptitude for perceiving and analysing social phenomena developed: in the well known case of Wacław Wyrobek, accused of embezzlement, he spoke of him not as a villain but as a victim of the economic conditions occurring in Cracow. He also involved himself in political work. He was a municipal councillor, although in his views he stood against the combining of national identity with religion, proclaiming the need to create something which today we would call a political nation. Despite his reserve towards Polish Catholic nationalism, L. Gumpłowicz, in a manner similar to his father, sympathised with the January Uprising. It is known that he took part in the transport of foodstuffs and arms during the conflict to the rebels in Miechów.

In 1868 L. Gumpłowicz started the process for a post-doctoral examination at the Jagiellonian University. With this goal in mind he submitted

two works: *Wola ostatnia w rozwoju dziejowym i umiejętnym* [The last will in historic and competent development] and *Prawodawstwo polskie względem Żydów* [Polish legislation in relation to Jews]. Both of these works aroused a decisively negative reaction amongst the university establishment. On the 8th of June 1868 both reviewers, the head of the Department of French and Polish Law: Piotr Burzyński, as equally the canonist Udalryk Heyzmann, gave a negative opinion; paying particular attention to the anti-Church accent within each work, the construction of an opposition between Christianity and Catholicism as well as the placing of too great an emphasis on the influences of the clergy; although they valued the candidate's talent and his knowledge of the law. This defeat was to push back Gumpłowicz's academic career by many years, and was also to be one of the fundamental reasons behind his emigration. Before this was to happen, however, Gumpłowicz was to live and work in Cracow for several years, where he was one of the editors of the liberal journal *Kraj*. This paper published the works of progressive authors, constituting a counterweight to the conservative publication *Czas*. Within *Kraj* articles were published propagating a modern conception of nation, in which everyone, peasants and Jews equally, was to gain access to education and equality of rights, which was treated as a condition for their integration into the national community, and also the increased participation of women in social life. It was most critical of the Catholic Church, perceived as an educating institution, an enemy of modern society. Religion was to be a private matter, while the political influences of the Church and its moral despotism were to be curtailed. Criticism was also levelled at the Jagiellonian University and the Academy of Learning, from where those of a liberal persuasion were in practice excluded.

In 1875 Gumpłowicz moved from Cracow to Graz. The reasons for this decision were surely various: besides the failure in his academic career these also included the collapse of the journal *Kraj*, as well as the fiasco of political ideas, particularly the dreams about unity within Jewish society and the chance of modernising the Jewish population within the framework of a modern, civil and not an ethnic nation. Emigration meant for the Gumpłowicz family the need to organise their lives again, which for a couple with three children could not have been easy. Nonetheless, Gumpłowicz had already submitted to the University of Graz an application on the 12th of July 1876 for a post-doctoral examination in the philosophy of the state and law. The post-doctoral piece *Robert v[on] Mohl als Rechts- und Staatsphilosoph* is not known in the original, though one can become acquainted with it on the basis of publications given after the defence. From the beginning the chances of obtaining the degree seemed slight, for the first review was negative, but before a decision was taken L. Gumpłowicz had submitted an application for

veniam legendi on the basis of the universal state law. The new reviewer presented his appraisal, on the basis of which Gumpłowicz was allowed to go onto the examination phase. This was to end successfully with L. Gumpłowicz being appointed assistant professor in general state law.

From March 1877 L. Gumpłowicz taught at the University of Graz. The financial situation of the family was, however, not the best. Only on the 21st of July 1882 Ludwik was nominated an associate professor. And with this there arrived a period of relative professional and financial stability, as well as the possibility to engage in problem areas of real interest to Gumpłowicz, namely social questions.

Ludwik Gumpłowicz's private life during the course of the years spent in Graz was to abound in dramatic and life changing events. On the 14th of July 1876, several days before being granted his post-doctoral degree, he was to learn of his father's suicide. A few years later his son Alfred Theodor died, while in 1897 his son Maksymilian Ernst committed suicide as a result of his unrequited love for Maria Konopnicka. In 1884 Ludwik and Franciszka left the Jewish community and a year later joined the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession. L. Gumpłowicz's academic career was to prosper and, though formally connected to the law, his real interest lay in sociology in the broad understanding of the word. He published his most important works – *Rassenkampf. Sociologische Untersuchungen* (1883), *Grundriss der Soziologie* (1885) – which were to decide on his position as a sociologist. Then for a few years he was to again concentrate on legal matters even though his relations with his colleagues at the Faculty of Law were not the best, presumably in the main because of Gumpłowicz's unorthodox views on the nature of the state, which he viewed chiefly through the prism of social phenomena. Gumpłowicz keenly wanted a full professorship, which he gained in 1893 (in administrative studies and Austrian administrative law).

The 1890s was the period in which L. Gumpłowicz developed and consolidated his international reputation. At this time he became a member and later vice-chairman of the Institut international de Sociologie in Paris, he published in *Rivista italiana di sociologia* and in the *American Journal of Sociology*. His works were translated into many languages. At the same time in his own Austrian circles amongst representatives of studies into the state and the law his position was weak and fraught with conflicts. With time, Gumpłowicz's personal situation was to become increasingly difficult. To the tragedy of his son's suicide was added his wife's progressive loss of sight as a result of illness. Ludwik helped her as he could though this limited his possibility to participate in international academic life. With sorrow he observed the intensification of German nationalism. His own health also deteriorated and, shortly before his 70th birthday, he developed cancer of the tongue. In 1908 he

retired and, on the 19th of August 1909 Ludwik and Franciszka Gumpłowicz committed suicide having swallowed cyanide. In this way, three generations of the Gumpłowicz family fulfilled their gloomy destiny, ending their lives through suicide. To the only living son, Władysław Gumpłowicz, they left a fair fortune. They are buried at the Viennese Protestant Cemetery at Matzleinsdorf.

Ludwik Gumpłowicz's biography, the places and time given to him to live in were to significantly affect his sociological interests and views. As I have recalled above in discussing legal matters, he had a tendency to view them in connection with social phenomena and processes. The fate of his family and of he himself was to make him sensitive to national, ethnic and cultural questions, to the mechanisms of modernising social changes.

Ludwik Gumpłowicz consciously constructed the frameworks of sociology as a separate science even though within his academic environment he had no possibility of enjoying a full institutionalisation of this new discipline. Sociology, in his view, was to be a science of social facts, it was to involve itself in the mutual interaction of groups and the configurations left as their result, from which the highest of all is the state. A social group is the only social reality, existence *sui generis*, influencing the individual. Such views make Gumpłowicz the creator (next to Emil Durkheim, and in fact before him) of the orientation within the social sciences called sociologism, proclaiming the autonomy of social entities. L. Gumpłowicz was a positivist, he considered the task of sociology to be the detection of the natural laws governing society; he considered however that social facts are different in their essence than other natural facts. To become acquainted with the laws governing social phenomena is the task of sociology. He criticised the explanation of social phenomena through their reduction to individual phenomena, he considered that social phenomena had their own traits and no knowledge about human entities would allow for an explanation of social facts.

The first sociological work for which Gumpłowicz was to achieve recognition was the book *Der Rassenkampf*. Race he understood as a social and cultural not a physical phenomenon. Race is the product of history, it is a cultural category defined by language, religions, customs, and law. Therefore this concept is in fact close to that of the ethnic group. Humanity is, according to L. Gumpłowicz, divided into races which remain in conflict with each other. Each group is characterised by an internal solidarity and by an antagonism in relation to other groups. This conflict is the law of nature, only the forms of the conflict change. The creation of states has resulted in them becoming those groups which fight amongst themselves, but conflict also affects those groups within the extent of the state, for example ethnic groups. L. Gumpłowicz's academic viewpoints undoubtedly have their roots not only in the

works of other authors he read but also, and possibly first and foremost, in his personal and family experiences. As a Polish Jew coming from a traditional, orthodox ethnic society, and later from a family which chose the route of modernisation, assimilation into a modern civil society in the framework of the multicultural Austrian monarchy, he had a chance and actually a need to reflect upon the processes of conflict amongst various social groups, to reflect on the connections and antagonisms amongst them. He was the representative of a minority which had suffered various forms of discrimination, and he himself had experienced, in a most painful way when trying to make an academic career for himself in Cracow, what the significance of conflict on a cultural-religious basis can be. Polish Catholic nationalism, whose spectacular manifestations so irritated him in Cracow in the early 1860s, excluded him from the world of academia simply because he had opposed in his publications the political and cultural domination of the Catholic Church and its attempt to subordinate the entirety of public life within a multicultural society to itself. Being connected personally and through his family with the Enlightenment idea of a liberal state and tolerance in relation to diversity, Gumplowicz had to see the immensity of the danger that is ethnic nationalism especially clearly. These fears he was to relive towards the end of his life while observing the rise of German nationalism.

Ludwik Gumplowicz constructed sociology as a general science, in accordance with the principles of positive science taking into consideration the entirety of social phenomena. However, he was also to write about the more specific questions that he was especially interested in. An example may be the earlier work, still written in Polish – *Prawodawstwo polskie względem Żydów* (1867) [Polish legislation in relation to Jews] – mentioned above in the context of his failed post-doctoral endeavours. In this work Gumplowicz reports on the development of the laws for Jewish society in Poland, criticising the regulations by which Jews were in effect excluded, their stigmatization if only through their treatment as a separate category of people serving some concrete goal, for example money lending. While he praised those laws which, like those issued by King Casimir the Great, have as their intention the bringing closer of Jews to other strata of the nation and their merging with the nation into a single political body. Gumplowicz regretted that the king's ideas did lead in this direction and dominate in a society in which 'in the field of the human spirit exclusive power lay with the Catholic Church.' He considered the Catholic Church and the clergy as the personification of the principles of conservatism, eternally hostile to any form of change whatsoever. These views of Gumplowicz constituted a preview of his later mature conception of a civil, political, modern nation arisen from the fusion of emancipated ethnic groups, though for certain

they did not arouse the sympathy of the then strong conservative factions within Cracow's academic circles.

Ludwik Gumpłowicz was certainly one of the most eminent scholars to have been born and educated in Cracow. He was one of the creators of sociology, although his role was not always appropriately valued. As with many others, he was forced to leave Cracow although in his case the decision was especially dramatic and would today arouse unequivocal feelings. Gumpłowicz had to emigrate to allow himself the opportunity to work in academia. Graz was of course far from an ideal location but one which was more conducive to Gumpłowicz's plans than Cracow had been. Ludwik Gumpłowicz was in a sense a tragic figure, despite the numerous successes and the undoubted role he played in the history of his discipline. He was a representative of a minority discriminated against, a Jew whose father had taken the decision to move out of the ghetto and to take an active part in the construction of a modern, multiethnic, political nation. Ludwik followed in his father's footsteps, not only in his choice of life path but also in his sociological conceptions. He was to pay a high price for this through rejection by those for whom the vision of nation was completely different.

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